



Community water fluoridation helps protect teeth against decay. More than 97 per cent of Victorians have access to fluoridated water but access is not equitable across the state.

The Victorian Action Plan to Prevent Oral Disease 2020-30 sets out a vision to achieve good oral health for all Victorians and includes a goal to increase access to fluoridated water to 95% of rural and regional Victorians.

While 99 per cent of people in metropolitan Melbourne have access to fluoridated water, only 88 per cent of people in rural and regional areas have access.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS WATER FLUORIDATION?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in rock, air, soil, plants and water. Water fluoridation is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride in drinking water to an optimal level to reduce tooth decay.

Community water fluoridation is a safe, equitable and cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay while reaching everyone in the community.

Access to fluoridated water can reduce tooth decay by 26% to 44% in children and adolescents, and 27% in adults.<sup>2</sup> In Australia, for every dollar that is spent on fluoridation, between \$7 and \$18 is saved due to avoided treatment costs.<sup>3</sup>

## WHY IS TOOTH DECAY A SERIOUS PROBLEM?

- Tooth decay is a common, preventable oral disease that can cause pain and infection and can have impacts on general health, self-esteem and participation in school and work.
- Around 2 in 5 children have experienced tooth decay in their primary (baby) teeth.<sup>4</sup>
- Experience of tooth decay increases over the lifetime and around 90 per cent of adults have experienced tooth decay at some stage in their life.<sup>6</sup>

In Victoria, dental conditions are the leading cause of preventable hospitalisations in children under 10 years old.<sup>5</sup>

## HOW DOES FLUORIDE WORK?

Fluoride can help to both prevent tooth decay and to reverse early stage tooth decay. Fluoride helps to strengthen the mineral structure of teeth and act as a repair kit at the early stages of tooth decay.

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT WATER FLUORIDATION IN MY LOCAL COMMUNITY?

If you live or work in a community without water fluoridation, check out the [Cohuna case study](#) to learn how Gannawarra Shire successfully advocated for water fluoridation for their community.

To find out if your drinking water is fluoridated, use the Department of Health's search tool.



## WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

You can get more information about water fluoridation by visiting the following websites:

- [Department of Health](#)
- [Letter from Victoria's Chief Health Officer](#)
- [Better Health Channel](#)

### References

<sup>1</sup>Department of Health. Water fluoridation in Victoria Water fluoridation for healthy teeth. [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2023 Sep. 14]. Available from [Water fluoridation in Victoria \(health.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/water-fluoridation-in-victoria)

<sup>2</sup>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Oral health and dental care in Australia [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023 [cited 2023 Aug. 11]. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia>

<sup>3</sup>Australian Academy of Science. What's the deal with fluoride? [Internet]. [cited 2023 Jun. 14]. Available from: [What's the deal with fluoride? - Curious \(science.org.au\)](https://www.science.org.au/curious/whats-the-deal-with-fluoride)

<sup>4</sup>ARCPOH. Oral health of Australia children: National Child Oral Health Study 2012-14. Adelaide: The University of Adelaide, South Australia.

<sup>5</sup>Department of Health. Child oral health [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2023 Jun. 14]. Available from: [Child oral health \(health.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/child-oral-health)

<sup>6</sup>ARCPOH. Australia's Oral Health: National Study of Adult Oral Health 2017-18. Adelaide: The University of Adelaide, South Australia.